

A
S E R M O N

Preached in the CATHEDRAL CHURCH of
ST. PAUL, LONDON:
On THURSDAY, MAY the 2^d, 1782.

BEING THE TIME
Of the YEARLY MEETING of the
CHILDREN Educated in the CHARITY-
SCHOOLS, in and about the Cities of LONDON
and WESTMINSTER.

By the Right Reverend FATHER in GOD, *Porter*
BEILBY, Lord Bishop of CHESTER.

Published at the Request of the SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,
And the TRUSTEES of the several SCHOOLS.

To which is annexed,
AN ACCOUNT OF THE
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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S E R M O N

ST. PAUL, LONDON:

On Thursday, May 10, 1802.

BEING THE FIRST
OF A SERIES OF
CATECHISMAL
SERMONS, BY
THE REV. JOHN

By the Rev. John

THE REV. JOHN



LONDON:

Printed by J. G. Smith, at the British Museum, in Strand, near the Theatre Royal, in the year 1802.

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C O N T E N T S.

Whoever wishes to become a Member of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, or to make any enquiry concerning it, is requested to write to the Rev. Mr. HALLINGS, Secretary to the Society, at No. 5, Bartlett's Buildings, Holborn, London, who will give him every necessary information and direction."

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the particular circumstance, to which I mean to
draw your attention at present, is the fact, that to the poor
the text in which we are told, that to the poor
the gospel is preached.

LUKE VII. 22.

THEN JESUS ANSWERING SAID UNTO THEM, GO
YOUR WAY, AND TELL JOHN WHAT THINGS YE
HAVE SEEN AND HEARD; HOW THAT THE BLIND
SEE, THE LAME WALK, THE LEPERS ARE
CLEANSED, THE DEAF HEAR, THE DEAD
ARE RAISED, TO THE POOR THE GOSPEL IS
PREACHED.

YOU will immediately recollect the occasion
on which these words were spoken. They
make a part of the answer which our Sa-
viour gave to the two disciples whom John the
Baptist sent to him, to ask whether he was the great
Deliverer that was to come, or they were to look
for another. The whole passage is a remarkable
one, and affords ample matter for observation; but

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the particular circumstance, to which I mean to draw your attention at present, is the last clause of the text, in which we are told, that **TO THE POOR THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED.**

That our Lord should appeal to the miracles which he had just wrought before the eyes of the two disciples, as an incontestible proof that he was the Messiah, will be thought very natural and proper; but that he should immediately subjoin to this, as an *additional* proof; and a proof on which he seems to lay as much stress as on the other, that **TO THE POOR THE GOSPEL WAS PREACHED**, may appear at the first view a little extraordinary. We shall, however, soon be satisfied that in this, as well as in every other instance, our divine Master acted with consummate wisdom. He was speaking to Jews. His object was to convince them that he was the MESSIAH. The obvious way of doing this was to shew that he corresponded to the description which their own prophets gave of that great personage. Now *they* speak of him as one, who should not only give eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame,

lame, and speech to the dumb, but should also
 PREACH GOOD TIDINGS TO THE MEEK AND THE
 POOR *; these were two *distinct and separate marks*
 by which he was to be known, and it was therefore
 as proper and necessary for our Saviour to refer to
 the one as to the other. Whoever pretended to be
 the MESSIAH, must unite in himself these two great
 discriminating peculiarities, which taken together
 form one of the most illustrious and beneficent cha-
 racters that can be imagined; a character distinguished
 by the communication of the greatest of all earthly
 blessings to two descriptions of men, who stood
 most in need of assistance, *the diseased, and the poor*.
 To the former, the promised Saviour of the world
 was to give *health*; to the latter, *spiritual in-*
struction. In this manner was the great Re-
 deemer marked out by the prophets, and this glo-
 rious distinction did Christ display and support in
 his own person throughout the whole course of
 his ministry.

* Isaiah
 xxix. 18,
 19. xxxv.
 5, 6.
 lxi. 1.

That he was infinitely superior to every other
 teacher of religion in the number, and the benevo-
 lent

lent nature of his miracles, is well known; and that he was no less distinguished by the circumstance of PREACHING TO THE POOR; that there was no one either before or after him, who made it so much his peculiar business to instruct them, and paid such constant and condescending attention to them as he did, is equally certain. The antient prophets were usually sent to kings and princes, to the rich and the great, and many of their prophecies were couched in sublime figurative language, beyond the comprehension of the vulgar. There were indeed other parts of the Jewish scriptures sufficiently plain and intelligible, and adapted to all capacities; but even these the rabbies and the scribes, the great expounders of the law among the Jews, contrived to perplex and darken, and render almost useless by their vain traditions, their absurd glosses, and childish interpretations. So far were they from showing any particular regard or tenderness to the common people, that they held them in the utmost contempt; they considered them

* John vii. as *accursed* *, because they knew not that law, which
48, 49. they themselves took care to render impenetrably obscure to them. “ They took away the key of

“ know-

“ knowledge; they entered not in themselves, and * Luke
 “ those that were entering in they hindered *.” It^{xi. 52.}
 was even a proverbial saying among them, *that the*
Spirit of God did not rest but upon a rich man †. So
 different were the maxims of the great Jewish
 teachers from the sentiments and conduct of that
 heavenly Instructor, who openly declared, and glo-
 ried in the declaration, that he came “ TO PREACH
 “ THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR †.”

Nor did the lower ranks of mankind meet with
 better treatment in the Heathen world. There
 were among the antient Pagans, at different periods,
 and in different countries, many excellent moral

† Grotius on Matth. xi. 5.

† It may be alledged, that by *the Poor*, to whom our Lord preached
 the gospel, the sacred writers meant not the poor in *circumstances*,
 but the poor *in spirit*. The truth is, they meant both; by our Savi-
 our's conduct both senses were equally verified; and these two sorts of
poverty are so frequently found united, that it is scarce necessary, at
 least in the present instance, to distinguish between them. For more
 complete satisfaction on this and some other points (of which but a
 very imperfect view is given here) see Bishop Hurd's admirable sermon
 on Matth. v. 3. f. 8.

writers

writers of fine talents and profound knowledge ; but their compositions were calculated not for the illiterate and the indigent, but for men of ability and erudition like themselves. They thought the poor below their notice or regard ; they could not stoop so low as to accommodate themselves to the understandings of the vulgar. Their ambition even in their ethical treatises, was to please the learned few. To these the Dialogues of Plato, the Ethics of Aristotle, the Offices of Cicero, the Morals of Seneca and of Plutarch, might afford both entertainment and information ; but had they been read to a Grecian or a Roman peasant, he would not, I conceive, have found himself either much enlightened or much improved by them. How should *he* get wisdom from such sources “ that holdeth the plough, and that
 “ glorieth in the goad ; that driveth oxen, and is
 “ occupied in their labours ; that giveth his mind
 “ to make furrows, and is diligent to give the kine
 “ fodder *.” Very different occupations these from the studies of the philosopher or the metaphysician, and not very well calculated to prepare the mind
 for

* Ecclus
 xxxviii.
 25, 26.

for the lectures of the academy, the Lyceum, or the Portico.

The truth is, there was not a single book of morality at that time written solely or principally for the use of the ignorant and the poor; nor had their duty explained to them in any other mode of instruction adapted to their capacities. They had no lessons of conduct given them so plain, so familiar, so forcible, so authoritative, as those which are now regularly dispensed to every Christian congregation; nothing that made the smallest approach to our Saviour's divine discourses, (especially that from the Mount) to the ten commandments, to the other moral parts of the Old and New Testament, or to the practical instructions and exhortations given weekly to the people by the ministers of the gospel. They were left to form a system of morality for themselves as well as they could; in which they were so far from being assisted by their national religion, that both the mode and the objects of their worship, were of themselves sufficient to corrupt their hearts, and to counteract any right opinions or virtuous inclinations

clinations that might casually spring up in their minds.

In this situation did our blessed Lord find the inferior class of mankind when he entered upon his ministry. He found them without guide, instructor, counsellor, or friend. He saw them (to use the affecting language of Scripture) "fainting and scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd, and he had compassion upon them*." He took them instantly under his protection, he shared with them the miseries of their condition. He assumed the form of a servant, submitted to all the hardships of that situation, and frequently "had not even where to lay his head." Although he did not *reject* the wealthy and the great, but on the contrary received them with the utmost kindness, whenever they shewed any marks of a right and teachable disposition, yet not "*many* noble, not *many* mighty, were at first called †." It was from among fishermen and mechanics that he chose his companions and apostles. It was to the poor he chiefly addressed his discourses. With these he principally lived and conversed;

* Matth.
ix. 36.

† 1 Cor.
i. 26.

conversed, and to their understandings was the greater part of his parables, his allusions, his reasonings, his precepts, and his exhortations, most kindly accommodated. "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes*." He taught them with a clearness, a simplicity, a dignity, a tenderness to which they had never before been accustomed, insomuch, that the "common people" heard him gladly; they were astonished at his doctrine, they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and they declared with one voice, that never man spake "as he spake †."

* Matth.
vii. 29.

† Mark
xii. 37.
Matth.
vii. 28.
Luke iv.
22.
John vii.
46.

Thus did our heavenly Instructor most exactly fulfil the predictions of the prophets and his own declarations, that he would EVANGELIZE TO THE POOR. The consequence was what might naturally be expected from a measure, as full of wisdom as it was of humanity, although totally opposite to the usual practice of moral teachers. In a short space of time that gospel which was at first preached more particularly to the poor,

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was embraced also by the *rich*; and became in a few centuries the established religion of the most powerful and extensive empire in the world, as it now is of all the most civilized and most enlightened kingdoms of the earth. Whereas *the renowned sages of antiquity*, by pursuing a contrary course, by making it their only object to please, amuse, and inform the learned and the great, were never able with all their wisdom and eloquence, to enlighten or reform a single province, or even a single city of any note or magnitude*.

We

* Hence it is obvious to remark, how very unfortunately those writers against Christianity have employed their time and labour, who have taken so much pains to prove that among the first converts to that religion, there were but few in proportion of any considerable rank or fortune. This is a charge which the first preachers of the gospel were so far from wishing to deny or dissemble, that they openly avowed and gloried in it†. Their successors have as little reason to be afraid, or ashamed of acknowledging the fact as they had. They justly consider it as one proof, among many others, of that *divine wisdom* which superintended and conducted the progress of Christianity,

in

† 1 Cor.
i. 26.

We have here then the utmost encouragement to tread in the steps of our divine Lawgiver, and to imitate, as far as we are able, that method of propagating his religion which he adopted, and which was attended with such signal success. Although it is undoubtedly our duty "to preach the gospel "to every creature *," to press it on all ranks of people, high and low, rich and poor; yet the example of our Lord plainly calls upon us to show a peculiar attention to those whom Providence has placed in the humbler conditions of life. The reasons for this are obvious: they are the same which probably influenced our Saviour's conduct in this respect, and they still subsist in their full force. The poor have in general much fewer opportunities of learning their duty themselves than the wealthy and the great: their education seldom qualifies them, and their constant cares and labours leave them but little leisure for acquiring

* Mark
xvi. 15.

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sufficient

in a way so different from what *worldly wisdom* would have dictated; beginning with the cottage and ending with the imperial throne. False religion has generally reversed this order, and has succeeded accordingly.

sufficient religious knowledge without assistance. Their spiritual as well as temporal necessities are but too often overlooked, and disregarded by their superiors, and yet they form by far the largest and most necessary part of the community. Add to all this, that they are commonly much freer from prejudice, much less wedded to systems and opinions, more open to conviction, more anxious to obtain information, and more ready to embrace truth, than the higher ranks of men. These circumstances evidently point them out as objects highly worthy of our utmost care and diligence, in furnishing their minds with those sacred truths, those rules of moral and religious conduct, which are necessary to render them "wise unto salvation."

With this view it was that THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE was first instituted. It breathes the true spirit of christianity, and follows, at a humble distance, the example of its divine Author, by diffusing the light of the gospel more especially among the Poor. This is its peculiar province and employment; and there are

Two ways in which it carries this benevolent purpose into execution.

The first is, by encouraging the erection of charity schools in every part of the kingdom, and by supplying them afterwards with proper religious instructions, and wholesome rules for their direction and good government. The fruit of these its pious labours and exhortations in this city and its neighbourhood, you have now before your eyes. You here see near five thousand children collected together from the charity schools in and about London and Westminster. A spectacle this, which is not, perhaps, to be paralleled in any other country in the world; which it is impossible for any man of the least sensibility to contemplate without emotions of tenderness and delight; which we may venture to say, that even our Lord himself (who always shewed a remarkable affection for children) would have looked on with complacency; and which speaks more forcibly in favour of this branch of the Society's paternal care and attention, than any arguments

ments for it that words could convey to you *. I shall, therefore, only observe on this head, that large as the number is of the charity children now present in this place, it bears but a small proportion to the whole number in the schools of Great-Britain and Ireland, which exceeds *forty thousand*. And when you consider that this Society was the original promoter, and has been the constant patron and protector of these schools, which have subsisted now for near a century; that the children educated in them are taken from the most indigent and helpless class of people; that consequently, without these schools, they would probably have had no education at all; and that nothing is so likely to preserve them from idleness, beggary, profligacy and misery, as impressing early and strongly on their unoccupied

* The trustees of the charity schools obtained permission this year to range the children (amounting to near five thousand) in a kind of temporary amphitheatre under the dome of St. Paul's, where the service was performed, and the sermon preached, the congregation occupying the area. The effect of so large a number of children, disposed in that form, and uniting with one voice in the responses and in the psalm-singing, was wonderfully pleasing and affecting. This practice, I understand, is meant to be continued.

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and uncorrupted minds sound principles of piety, industry, honesty and sobriety; you will be sensible that the Society has adopted a plan no less beneficial to the public, than conformable to the sentiments of the great Author of our religion, in recommending charity schools as one very effectual method of PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.

But the Society goes still further than this. It does not confine its cares merely to the *childhood* of the Poor; it follows them, with unremitted kindness, through every subsequent period of their lives. It is the guard of their youth, the companion of their manhood, the comfort of their old age. The principal part of its employment is to provide, at a very considerable expence, and to disperse among the lower people of all ages and occupations, a very large number of bibles, common prayer-books, and small tracts, on a variety of religious subjects, composed purposely for their use by men of eminent piety and ability, adapted to their capacities, and accommodated to all their various spiritual wants. In these are explained to them, in the clearest and most

most familiar terms, the first grounds and rudiments of their faith, the main evidences and most essential doctrines of christianity, the several duties they owe to God, their neighbour, and themselves, and the nature and benefits of the two christian sacraments. By these also they are assisted in the service of the church, in their private devotions, in reading, understanding, and applying the holy scriptures; are supported under afflictions, are guarded against temptation, are fortified more especially against those vices to which the poor are most subject, and furnished with proper cautions and arguments, to preserve them from the artifices of popery, and the delusions of enthusiasm.

This is a short sketch of the several objects to which the governing members of our Society have directed their attention, and the provision they have made for the instruction of the ignorant and the poor. Of the little treatises here alluded to, some might undoubtedly be much improved, and some, perhaps, might be spared. But many of them are excellent, the greatest part extremely useful, and
calculated

calculated to do essential service to that rank of men among whom they are distributed. Nor is the benevolence of our Society restrained within the limits of this island only. Its principal object is indeed, as it certainly ought to be, the instruction of our own poor; but it has occasionally extended its kind assistance to other countries, both neighbouring and remote. It has established schools and missions in various parts of the East Indies, for the conversion and instruction of the Heathens; and has dispersed among them many religious tracts in the Malabar language. It has carried its regard to the Greek church in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt. For this purpose it has printed the new testament and psalter in Arabic, and has already sent a large number of both, with some other tracts, into Persia and India. It has published three several editions of the bible in the Welsh language, and distributed them through every part of Wales, to the amount of fifty thousand copies. It has made provision for the education of youth, and the due celebration of divine worship, in the Scilly Islands, where there was the

utmost need of both; and it has likewise printed and dispersed over the Isle of Man many thousand copies of the old and new testament, of the common prayer, and other religious books, in the vulgar language of that island*.

By this constant attention of the managers of the Society to the spiritual wants of the poor in many different parts of the world, as well as at home, the number of religious tracts and books which they have distributed, from their first institution to this day, is so immensely great, as almost to exceed belief†. And although, in some instances, the success of their endeavours has not fully answered their expectations, yet there can be no doubt but that upon the whole their labours have done infinite service to the cause of religion. Indeed, all the Clergy who are members of the Society, and have made a constant and discreet use of their tracts, can

* See the account of the Society's proceedings subjoined to this sermon.

† Even within the last fifty years, the number of books and tracts distributed by them has amounted to no less than 2,834,371.

bear,

bear, and many of them *have* borne, ample testimony to the advantages resulting from them. Next to the stated offices of divine worship, and the regular instructions from the pulpit, it is evident, that nothing can contribute more to excite and keep alive a due sense of religion in the minds of the common people, than supplying them constantly with a variety of well-composed and well-chosen religious treatises, each of them judiciously adapted to their respective necessities. It supplies, in some degree, the want of that most useful branch of ministerial duty which has, I fear, of late years, grown but too much into disuse, *personal conference with our parishioners*; for which, unless we have some such substitute as this, we shall find, probably, that our public instructions will produce much less effect than they naturally ought.

There is another argument for the distribution of small religious tracts among the common people, which has, I think, considerable weight. It appears, that this is the very mode made use of by two of our most formidable enemies, I mean, Infidels

and Papists; by the one to *corrupt* religion, and by the other to *destroy* it. There are undoubted proofs that the former recommend, and practise it, as the most effectual method of *diffminating* irreligion among all ranks of people*; and we know, from our own experience in this country, that the latter are indefatigable in dispersing a multitude of little books, most artfully composed, in defence of the several superstitious doctrines of their church, in order to impose on the credulity of the vulgar, and seduce them into their communion†.

* It is certain, that M. Voltaire, in particular, has written innumerable little pieces against Revelation; that he prided himself greatly in having found out this method of *enlightening the world*; and that he was highly applauded by Mr. D'Alembert and others, for the wisdom and prudence of his conduct in this respect.

† The industry of the Roman Catholics, in supplying their people with a vast variety of small tracts on religious subjects, is no secret. In a funeral discourse lately published on the death of an eminent divine of the Romish church, *Richard Chaloner*, who is called *Bishop of Debra*, and *Apostolic Vicar of the London District*, may be seen a list of near forty Popish tracts, in recommendation of his religion, which were all the produce of his single pen.

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Let us then endeavour to foil our enemies at their own weapons, which will surely prove more powerful, and more successful, in the hands of truth, than in those of error; and let us, with that view, give all possible encouragement to a Society, which is instituted for the very purpose of furnishing us with a constant supply of the best helps towards counteracting the pernicious designs of those who "set themselves against us;" who make use of every artifice to deprive us of all religion, or to introduce a corrupt one.

Inconsiderable and trivial as the little treatises dispersed by the Society may seem, yet it is by the repeated efforts of such small instruments as these, that the greatest effects are often produced. Their numbers, their plainness, and their cheapness, will give them a force and efficacy, and extent of circulation, which much more voluminous and more laboured compositions may not be able to acquire; just as we see that the lowest and humblest, and most numerous bodies of men, not the opulent and splen-

did few are those that constitute the real strength and wealth of the community.

It has been frequently asserted, that it is PHILOSOPHY, MODERN PHILOSOPHY, which has enlightened and improved mankind. But whom has it enlightened and improved? A small knot, perhaps, of wits and philosophers, and learned men; but how have *the multitude*, the bulk of the people, those who really constitute *the world*, been enlightened and improved? Do *they* read the works of Bolingbroke, of D'Alembert, of Hume, or of Raynal? Thanks be to God those elaborate and bulky compositions are equally beyond their understandings to comprehend, their leisure to peruse, and their ability to purchase. Most fortunately for mankind, the mischief of such writings is confined (comparatively speaking) to a very narrow circle, which their admirers, however, are pleased to dignify with the name of *the world*. The vulgar, the vile populace, so far are those great philosophers from desiring to instruct and reform, that they think

think them *utterly unworthy of a reasonable religion*. This the most eminent of their fraternity has declared in exprefs terms *. On the other hand, the Author of *our religion* declares, that he came TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. Here then you fee opposed to each other the spirit of CHRISTIANITY and the spirit of PHILOSOPHY. Judge ye, for yourselves, which is most worthy of God and beneficial to man, and make your choice accordingly. If you take PHILOSOPHY for your guide, you will despise the humble employment of diffusing religious knowledge among the common people; but if you chuse CHRIST for your master, you will give a proof of it this day, by patronizing a Society that forms

* Mr. Voltaire speaking of certain superstitious sects in China, has these very remarkable words: Ces sectes sont tolerees á la Chine pour l'usage du Vulgaire, comme des alimens grossiers faits pour le nourrir; tandis que les magistrats & les lettrés, separés en tout du peuple, se nourrissent d'une substance plus pure. Il semble en effet que la populace ne merite pas une religion raisonnable.

Essai sur l'Histoire Generale, Tom. i. p. 33, 34.

itself

itself on *his* model, and professes to carry on the great work of reformation which *He* begun, in the very way which he pointed out, BY PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.



T H E E N D.